



MARYLAND FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

representing the Maryland Emergency Services Officers with Progression While Maintaining Tradition

On behalf of the Maryland Fire Chiefs Association (MFCA), I would like to express our support for the creation of a nationwide wireless broadband network for public safety using 10 MHz of spectrum in the 700 MHz band currently scheduled for public auction in combination with 12 MHz in the 700 MHz band previously allocated for public safety. This proposal will help public safety in many ways.

Public safety has to be in charge of the broadband network. Furthermore, as a condition for receiving the license for the spectrum designated to be auctioned, the auction winner should be required to enter into an agreement with a group of public safety organizations, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), US Fire Administration (USFA), and other Federal Public Safety Agencies establishing that public safety has control over how the network is built.

It is also important that the broadband network reach all areas of the country, including the rural and underserved portions that tend to rely more heavily on volunteer emergency services.

Communications operability and interoperability are both significant challenges for the volunteer fire and emergency services. There are approximately 24,000 volunteer departments in the United States relying on patchwork communications systems utilizing a multitude of frequencies. Achieving interoperability at the state or regional level would require a significant infusion of resources. Due to a lack of funding, however, many departments struggle with basic equipment and apparatus upkeep. For some departments, purchasing expensive communications equipment in order to improve operability or to become interoperable simply isn't an option.

By subscribing to the broadband network, public safety agencies would potentially be able to communicate with agencies on different MHz bands using different equipment. This would give volunteer public safety agencies the ability to upgrade communications systems for operability purposes while maintaining interoperable communications with other agencies that subscribe to the network. Agencies that choose not to upgrade communications equipment could still improve their ability to communicate with other agencies through the broadband network.

We appreciate having an opportunity to discuss this proposal. If you have any other questions feel free to contact me or Ed Woods, NFCO, Deputy Chief, Glenn Dale Fire Association 240-508-8663.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Small, Jr.
President